Centennial

Of the

Catholic Settlement

At

Ruma, Illinois

1818 — 1918

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By REV. P. J. BYRNE

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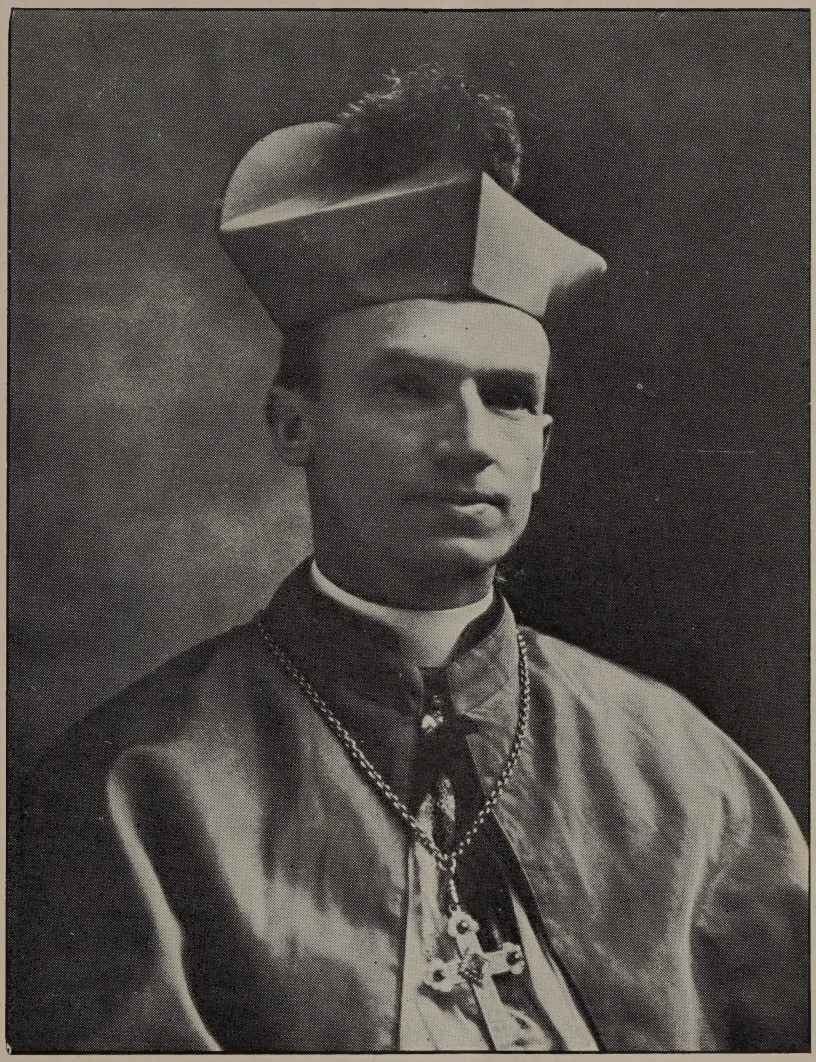

RT. REV. HENRY ALTHOFF, D. D.,

Bishop of the Diocese of Belleville, who pontificated at the Centennial at Ruma, Ill. September 4, 1918, was ordained July 26, 1902, and consecrated bishop February 24, 1914

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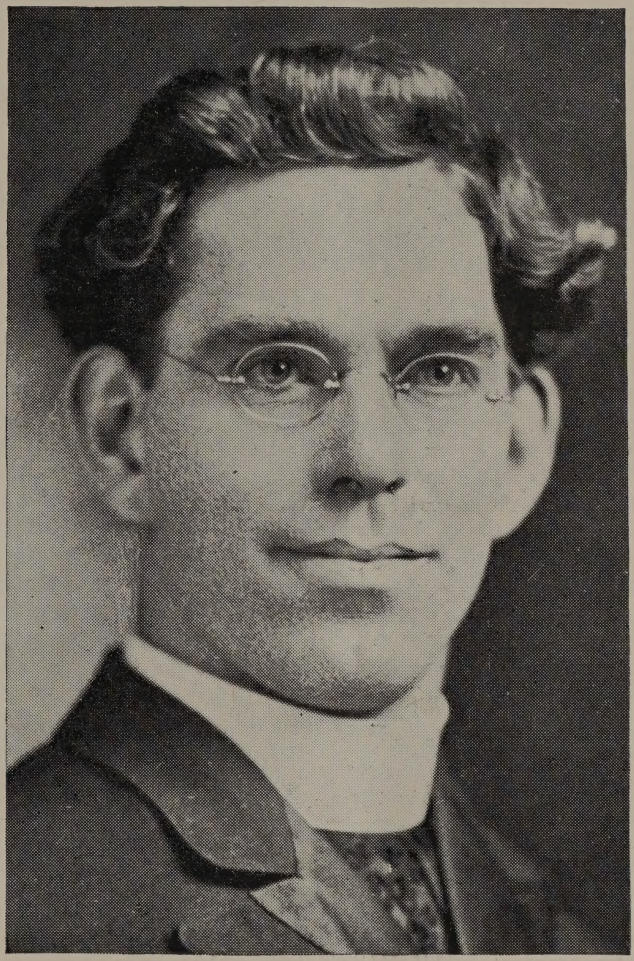
THE COMMITTEE.



Rev. P. J. Byrne, present pastor of St. Patrick's Church

Centennial of the Catholic Settlement at Ruma, Illinois

1818—1918

At a time when Illinois is celebrating her Centennial as a State, it is with no small feelings of pride that the present Catholic congregation of Ruma celebrates the Centennial of their parish—the first English-speaking Catholic Settlement in the State of Illinois.

Of course before Illinois was admitted into the Union the Catholic Church in the territory now covered by the State and especially along the Mississippi was almost ancient history; yet the parishes or missions were composed mostly of converted Indians or of French Colonists ministered to by French priests.

We do not mean to say that this Settlement was fully organized as a parish, one hundred years ago, but that the nucleus was formed, the mustard seed was sown that afterwards grew into a great tree.

The story of the birth of a Catholic Settlement at Ruma reads like a romance. In the latter part of the 18th century and in the beginning of the 19th, Ireland was in her Gethsemane. Thousands of her children naturally sought a land free enough in which to practice their faith. In Maryland, the cradle of religious freedom in the New World they found such a clime.

Among the Emigrants who left for Maryland was one Henry O'Hara—the grandfather of the hero of our sketch. He carried with him the deep faith of his native land, and instilled it into his progeny

Visions of rich tracts of land then offered at a cheap rate to pioneer settlers loomed up before the eyes of many of the descendants of the Lord Baltimore party and other emigrants. Hence we find them moving from Maryland first to Kentucky and later to Illinois. No railroads then spanned the states, but with a patience and a perseverance incomprehensible in our day, these pioneers followed the trails in oxwagons or pushed their flat-bottomed skiffs along the Ohio and Mississippi till they reached their destined home.

Henry O'Hara and his family consisting of his wife Margaret, nee Brown, and ten children, left Fredrick County, Maryland, in 1811 and moved to Nelson County, Ky. The children, many of whose names appear on the tomb stones of Ruma, were as follows: Mary, Amelia, Catharine, James, Thomas, Samuel, Henry, Sarah, John and Charles. After spending six years in Kentucky they set out for Illinois in the fall of 1817. The family seems to have settled in St. Clair County for a short period, till the depredations of the then incensed Indians caused them to move to Randolph County. A temporary home was procured for the family in the American bottoms below Prairie du Rocher. In the meantime Mr. O'Hara was seeking a permanent and desirable spot in which to pitch his tent. This he found near the present town of Ruma. He purchased the Walnut Ridge, a tract of about 800 acres and fancied on account of its many springs which are still gushing forth their sparkling waters. Here he built a rude log cabin, and the O'Hara family took possession in the fall of 1818.

Residence of Henry T. O'Hara, Ruma, Ill.

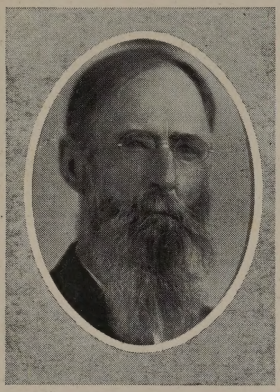
This cabin was the first Church, for this parish like many others in pioneer days had its inception in a private home. The accompanying picture of the O'Hara home, shows a modern building, but it is an addition to the old log cabin. The room in which Holy Mass was first offered up is still intact. The oldfashioned side board which served as the first altar, and a brass candlestick which did duty then, are cherished relics in the O'Hara home today, and are still in a wonderful state of preservation. An old massive clock of one hundred years ago and which was purchased in Kentucky, is still ticking on the wall, and I have been informed by present occupants that it has kept reliable time, and until recently has never been remodeled.

This neighborhood became then known as the O'Hara Settlement. The first log church was called the O'Hara Church. The writer received a letter recently referring to an old settler who had moved away and who described himself as being baptised in the O'Hara Church.

No sooner had this good Catholic family settled here than it became the nucleus of a Catholic parish. The Mudds, and the Fahertys and the Simpsons were among the first settlers and also enthusiastic in the faith. The O'Haras and the Mudds intermarried in Kentucky and naturally wished to colonize together in Illinois. It is the tradition amongst the oldest representatives of the O'Hara and Faherty families that Holy Mass was offered up in the O'Hara home, irregularly till 1820, when a priest came regularly once a month either from Prairie du Rocher or from Kaskaskia. James O'Hara whom I interviewed is now within a few years of his four score, and Mr. Faherty will soon be celebrating his own Centennial. Mr. Faherty attended mass as a child in the O'Hara home, and was present at the building of the first church. His father and elder brothers helped to build it. He is a cousin of the first person buried in the local cemetery in 1822. Mr. O'Hara and Mr. Faherty are intelligent gentlemen and are good authority for the statements made herein. The name of the parish priest they remember as F. Desmoulins then of Kaskaskia, and Fr. Olivier then pastor of Prairie du Rocher. This becomes all the more probable from the fact that the O'Haras tarried in Kaskaskia and were for a short time with-

in the limits of Prairie du Rocher, and must have been acquainted with the pastors.

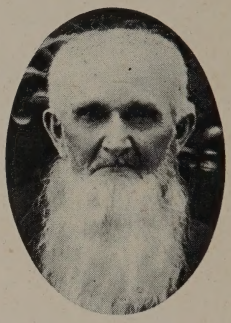
Henry O'Hara died in 1826. Before his death he donated one hundred



James R. O'Hara

acres of land for church purposes. From this we can realize the worth of the man. One of his holy inspirations from the beginning was to erect a church on his farm. He had already designated a plot of ground as a burial place. The first burial took place as early as 1822, of which mention will be made later. The tract so generously donated was deeded to the Bishop in 1827, shortly after the death of the donor. In this year a log church had been erected. It stood about fifty feet west of the present church. It was fifty feet long by twenty feet wide, and fourteen feet high. Bishop Rosati of St. Louis gave faculties to Father Donatien Olivier to bless this church at the O'Hara Settlement in 1830.

Up to this time records of the O'Hara Settlement were made at Prairie du Rocher and Kaskaskia. But from the year 1831 records of births, marriages and deaths were kept at the settlement itself. At this time Rev. V. Paillaison signs his name to the records. On the 4th day of May, 1831, Bishop Rosati confirmed a class of forty-eight children and adults. From 1831-39 Rev. Vital Van Cloostere attended the settlement. Then Rev. John Kenny was appointed resident pastor till 1842. He



Michael Faherty

was succeeded by Rev. Patrick McCabe 1842-50; Rev. James A. Keane 1850-52; Rev. Timothy Conway 1852-54; and Rev. John Gifford 1854-59.

Pioneer Settlers.

About the same time and in the same year, 1818, that the O'Hara Settlement was formed, the Faherty and Mudd families moved to Randolph County and settled not far from the first pioneer. The Fahertys originally came form Ireland and first settled in Maryland. As early as September 16, 1822, one Michael Faherty born in 1818 was buried in the parish cemetery. An inscription beneath his name on the slab erected over his grave states: "This is the first person buried in this graveyard." Since then the rows and the lots in Ruma Cemetery are closely lined with this pioneer

name. Ruma seems to have produced Fahertys in abundance and again taken them to her bosom. Today only one family of the name lives within the parish, but I believe there are a few survivors who have sought better opportunities in St. Louis than could be found in Ruma.

Almost simultaneously the Mudd family moved to this locality. James Mudd was the pioneer of the family and came in 1818. Since then the Mudds have become so numerous around Ruma that it would take a volume in itself to account for them. The Mudds are of Scotch descent on their father's side, and of English descent on their mother's side. To fully realize the extent of the family and the amount of good they must have done in a struggling early parish here, we have to go through the old cemetery and muster their names in the roll call of the dead. .

The next family that helped to make Ruma in its early history is the Simpson family. The Simpson's are of Anglo-Irish descent. The pioneer of the name in Randolph County was James D. His ancestors were of the Lord Baltimore party. The Simpsons were amongst the first in the wave of emigration from Maryland. On arriving in Illinois they first settled near Springfield but later moved to Randolph County where the family has branched out and become very populous. They have always made the Catholic Faith the keynote of their lives. Their worth and work in upbuilding the Ruma Congregation is incalculable. There seems to be a silent rivalry in numbers between the O'Haras, the Fahertys, the Simpsons and the Mudds in the city of the dead which surrounds our parish church. Such family names as Brewers, Vensons and Horrells, may also be mentioned amongst the earliest settlers. Later came the Donohues, the Sheas, the Liddys, Walshes, Whelans and a host of other names too numerous to mention and all sons of the Emerald Isle or their immediate descendants.

RUMA IN MODERN TIMES.

The present brick church was completed during the pastorate of Fr. Gifford. The corner stone was laid in 1849 by Bishop Van de Velde of Chicago. Mass was offered up in the new church for the first time in 1854.

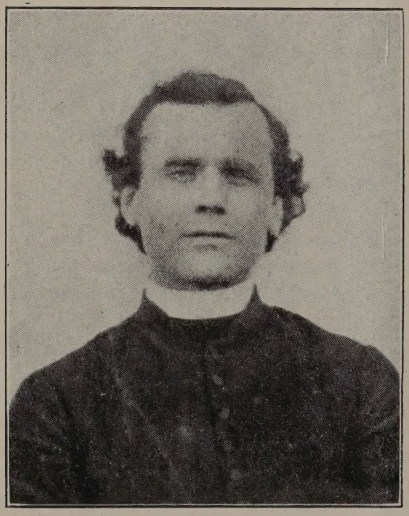
The church erected in 1854 still stands in the hills of Ruma. It was built of red brick and in the Roman style. Although it has no pretentions to architectural beauty yet it is commodious and serves its purpose well.

Rev. Francis Recouvreur succeeded Fr. Gifford as pastor in 1859. During his pastorate was built the present brick rectory, which like the church begins to show its age. He also commenced the erection of a large two-story brick building which was to serve as an academy for ladies, but his successor Rev. Augustine Hinzlein opened it as a college for boys. Undoubtedly on account of its isolated location and the inconvenience of students in reaching there and the consequent lack of finances the college failed in spite of the efforts of its learned professors, among whom are included such erudite scholars as Rt. Rev. Monsignor Cluse, Rev. Bernard Claus, Rev. A. Hinzlein, Rev. John F. Mohr, Rev. Lawrence Hoey, Rev. M. Keane, Rev. A. Brumleve, Rev. A. Vogt, Rev. A. Roettger and Rev. Joseph Meckel. The college was abandoned in 1876 and sold to the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood. It is now the motherhouse of the order.

Rev. Augustine Hinzlein came to

St. Patrick's Church, Ruma, Ill.

Ruma in 1867. He was first president of the college and also pastor of the congregation. He was a talented young priest, born in France 1842, where he also studied till he received subdiaconate. He then became professor in his native land for three years, after which time he came to Alton in 1866, where he was raised to the priesthood by Bishop Junker. His untimely death occurred in 1869. His body lies buried adjacent to the entrance of St. Patrick's Church.

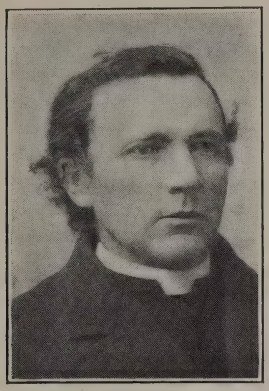


Rev. Augustine Hinzlein

Rev. John Mohr and Rev. A. Vogt temporarily administered the parish duties until Rev. Lawrence Hoey became pastor in 1870. Fr. Hoey was a native of Ireland but came at an early age to this country. His education was brilliant. He occupied the chair of philosophy at the Chicago University. He later became professor in Seaton Hall College, Rochester, where John Gilmary Shea, the famous historian, was his pupil. Fr. Hoey signed his graduating diploma. When Bishop Baltes was appointed to the See of Alton, Fr. Hoey came West again, and buried his great talents in the little

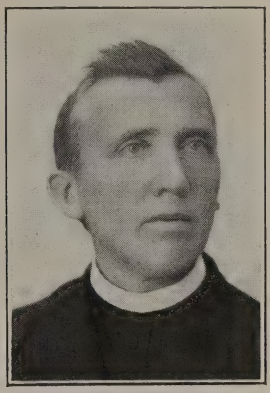
congregation at Ruma. He left here for other fields and wherever he labored was beloved. Fr. Hoey died Feb. 20, 1898, at Brown's Settlement in Christian County.

After Fr. Hoey left Ruma in 1874 he was succeeded by the Rev. A. Vogt,



Rev. A. Vogt

who remained the pastor and good shepherd of his flock during the long space of twenty-seven years. During his pastorate, undoubtedly feeling the loneliness of the situation out here in the woods, with nothing to break the monotony but the exasperating summer song of "Katy-did" and in spring the Whip-poor-will, Fr. Vogt made an effort to remove the buildings to the neighboring town of Ruma. He made very generous offers financially to the congregation—in fact offered to build the church at his own expense, if the congregation would pay for the roofing, but he finally abandoned the idea on account of a little opposition. So St. Patrick's Church is still in the woods. Rev. A. Vogt was born Nov. 29, 1832, at Lohre in Oldenburg. He studied at Notre Dame, Ind., St. Thomas, Ky., and Mount St. Mary's of the West, Cincinnati. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1859 and died at Glen Addie May 25, 1903, soon after leaving Ruma. He was possessed of considerable wealth, but he died intestate and St. Patrick's Congregation who had turned down his generous offers during his pastorate never received a cent.



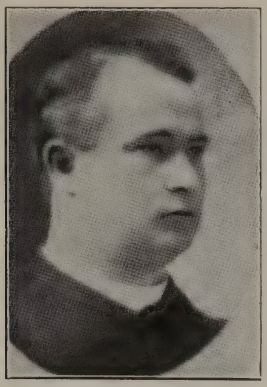
Rev. Herman Hegemann

Rev. Herman Hegemann succeeded Fr. Vogt from 1901-05. He is still spoken of in the congregation as being a pious and zealous priest. He retired from active duty in 1905 and then sought a rest form his labors, at St. Vincent's Hospital, Belleville, Ill. Here he died May 12, 1906, and his remains were laid to rest in the burial grounds at Glen Addie.

After the retirement of Fr. Hegemann Rev. N. Dietrich was appointed pastor. He officiated for the short space of one year, did his duty zealously, but again sought the humble station of an assistantship at Carlyle, which position he holds at present.

Rev. Francis Pieper was appointed to the pastorship of Ruma in 1906. He ruled over the destinies of the congregation till his untimely death in 1913. His pastorate was a benediction to the congregation. During those

seven years he made many improvements in church and surroundings. The church was frescoed, new stations



Rev. Francis Pieper

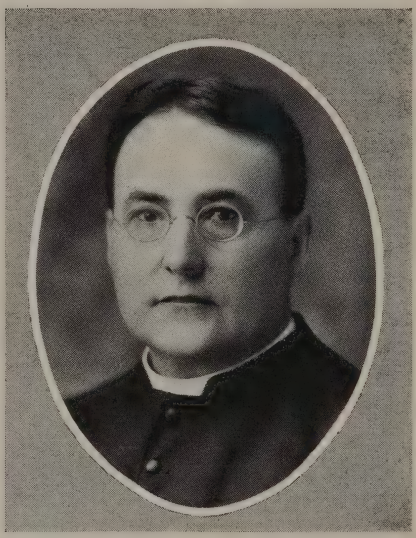
of the Cross erected, an additional school room was added to the school building, and he also erected the present belfry. He was beloved by the

Rev. W. Fischer

priests and idolized by the people. "But death loves a shining mark." He died September 19, 1913, at the age of 40 years. His body lies beneath the shadow of the cross in St. Patrick's cemetery.

After the death of Fr. Pieper, Rev. W. Fischer was made administrator of the parish until March 1914. This was Fr. Fischer's first charge and he acquitted himself nobly of it. The people have still happy recollections of his term amongst them.

On St. Patrick's day 1914, Rev. Albert Kaercher was installed as pastor of Ruma. His quiet and unobtrusive manner at once found favor amongst the people. His years in Ruma were



Rev. A. Kaercher

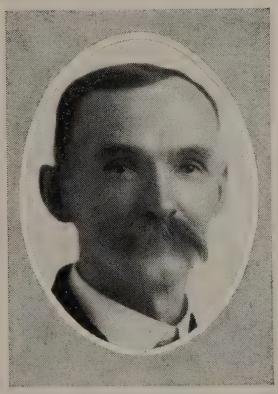
years of famine on the farm, yet by his zeal and the hearty co-operation of his people Fr. Kaercher was able to keep the parish in a healthy condition. He received a well merited promotion to St. Augustine's parish,

Breese, Ill., on Jan. 20, 1916, at which time the people of Ruma were reluctant to part with him.

He was succeeded by Rev. P. J. Byrne, the present incumbent, who was promoted from St. Luke's parish in Belleville. During this pastorate the rectory was remodeled and furnished. The Church Sanctuary was enlarged and carpeted. New pews were installed at a cost of $800 and a Corpus, or, the body of Christ crucified, was attached to the large stone cross in the parish cemetery. A fund is started by the Holy Name Society for the purpose of erecting a substantial fence around the cemetery; and plans are under consideration for a tower to the old church, or at least a vestibule.

The pastor and writer of this souvenir must pay a compliment not only to the congregation as a whole for their generous support in all things, but especially to the present trustees of the church, Mr. John Shea and Mr. Pius Simpson.

Lay trustees often seem to think that their special duty is to kick against anything progressive; but here are two gentlemen who believe in progress and are not satisfied with things and conditions because they were good enough for our grandfathers.



John Shea, Trustee

Pius Simpson, Trustee

The School.

For a number of years the small sacristy served as a school. A lay teacher was employed until after the pastorate of Fr. Vogt, when the school was placed in charge of Sisters of the Precious Blood. The present school was built in 1876. It is 34 feet by 22 and cost $700. During the year 1912 another smaller room was added.

St. Patrick's School has been fortunate in always having efficient teachers. On pages 14 and 15 is a picture of a modern class at the Ruma Parish School. Sr. Bertha, the teacher, is still in charge, is beloved by the children and is one of the most humble and selfsacrificing teachers the writer has ever met. It is a colossal work for one teacher to conduct a school like St. Patrick's, but besides this Sr. Bertha also conducts the Choir and tends to the Altar and Sacristy. About forty children are on the school roll at present. During the year 1915-16 Sr. Alfreda, an accomplished musician, acted as organist and also taught the little ones.

Picture of school children

The parish consists of about sixty families at present. In recent years thrifty families of German descent and birth have entered the congregation, but the vast majority are still of Irish or Anglo-Irish descent and all combined with a few exceptions are substantial supporters of their parish church in which they take a legitimate pride. We subjoin the present family names in alphabetical order:

Baum, Louis
Brown, Harry
Birke, John
Buttler, Martin
Buehler, Frank
Dinan, Wm.
Dinan, Ferd.
Donohoe, Eu.
Donohoe, Patrick
Donohoe, Mrs. Ml.
Donohoe, Martin
Degenhardt, Frank
Danter, Henry
Danter, Adolph
Danter, John
Dixon, Wm.
Elner, Mrs. John
Elner, John Jr.
Elner, Gus.
Elner, Adolph
Erle, Mrs. Peter
Eichenseer, John
Eichenseer, Joseph
Eichenseer, Geo.
Faherty, Austin
Fogarty, Michael
Folan, Mrs. P.
Frank, Mrs. Mary
Hess, Henry
Horrell, Leo
Horrell, Adeline
Huetsch, Jos.
Humphrey, Michael
Kemp, Mrs. B.
Mudd, Wm.
Mudd, Mrs. Lulu
Mudd, Mrs. Lem.
Mudd, Dion
Mudd, Bennett
Mudd, Damien
Mudd, Hilary
Mud, Joe
McDermott, Frank
Moll, Philip
Myerscough, Rich.
Myerscough, John
Myerscough, Joe
Myerscough, Peter
O'Hara, James P.
O'Hara, Henry
O'Hara, Charles
Ready, Mrs. Mary
Reinecker, Ed.
Reihl, Leonard
Simpson, Pius
Simpson, Harry
Simpson, Damien
Simpson, Clarence
Simpson, Charles
Shea, John
Shea, Henry
Shea, James
Siegfried, Anton
Siegfried, Arnold
Walsh, N.

Not only has the parish been blessed with good priests and good parishioners during its long history, but it prides itself in furnishing to the Church itself many who devoted themselves to the religious life. The following list would do honor to any parish:

Rev. Odillo Eichenseer, O. F. M.

Brother Firmus Eicheseer, O. F. M.

Brother Alben Faherty.

Sister Margaret Eichenseer, Order of Precious Blood.

Picture of school and children

Sister Dorothea, Margaret Simpson, Order of Precious Blood.

Sister Alphonsa, Clara Mudd, Order of Precious Blood.

Sister Edwiga, Eva Degenhardt, Order of Precious Blood.

Sister Lorena, Cybil Mudd, Order of Precious Blood.

Sister Cleta, Anna Eichenseer, Poor Hand Maids.

Sister M. Georgia, Elizabeth Eichenseer, Poor Hand Maids.

Sister Ursula, Anna Dixon, Franciscan.

Sister Angela, Margaret Kelly, Franciscan.

Sister Lucia, Elizabeth Kelly, Franciscan.

Sister Beata, Margaret Vinson, Franciscan.

The Societies established in the parish are: the Altar Society, Young Ladies' Sodality, Apostolship of Prayer, Junior Sodality and Holy Name Society.

Mrs. Lulu Mudd is at present the president of the Altar Society. She has an enviable Catholic disposition, and is always ready to marshal her faithful band of workers together when the pastor makes known the needs of the parish. The Altar Society was established during the pastorate of Fr. Recouvreur. It included men and women and they have done laudable work. The establishment of the Holy Name Society in recent years created a happy rivalry between the men and women of the parish—all are doing wonders.

The Young Ladies' Sodality was established Dec. 1906. Since then all the young ladies of the parish take a pride in belonging to it. They are faithful to their monthly communion

and also to the recitation of the office of the B. V. M. Miss Esther Simpson is now president.

In recent years, the Solemn Communicants are placed in the Junior Sodality, till they arrive at the age of eighteen, then they are received into the Young Ladies' Sodality or the Holy Name Society. They are very edifying in the reception of the Sacraments, which occurs once a month.

The Holy Name Society embraces all the men and young men of the parish. This is the grandest Society of any parish, and is the pride of Ruma. Women are naturally religious, but there is something inspiring about a Society of men, approaching the Sacraments in a body. They are an inspiration to one another and an edification to the whole parish. The members of this Society mutually assist one another and also are a material benefit to the parish. "In union there is strength." John Shea is president and Henry Hess, secretary-treasurer.

A Last Word.

The present parishioners of Ruma surely love their parish. They respect their pastor and do all in their power to live up to the requirements of Holy Church. But Ruma has been very prolific. Her children have sought other climes. They are scattered over the face of the New World. But wherever you are, your thoughts and hearts often turn to the place where you first saw the light—where your fathers lie buried in six feet of consecrated clay. When you laid them peacefully away, the mound over their bones may have been attractive and covered with wreaths of the lily and the rose. But my dear reader, remember the lily and the rose soon fade away and lose their odor, and obnoxious weeds grow over the bones of your dead. Weeds are prolific and especially in a cemetery. Labor now is scarce at best, but in a cemetery uninviting. Tornadoes still blow over the hills of Ruma, and monuments you erected are bent or fallen. You can therefore imagine the pastor in the heat of a summer sun trying to keep the Cemetery respectable. He tends the graves of those he never knew; while you perhaps never think about the fact that labor now costs money.

May I not here make an appeal to all, especially to the absent brethren, to write at least once a year to the resident pastor, and send him the where-with-all to keep the graves of their loved ones in proper, Christian, and Catholic respectability. If you do not, you are not only lacking in love and reverence but also in Christian duty to those to whom you owe your existence. Don't say you love those over whose graves you allow the weeds to grow.

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